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THE CATHOLIC LAYMAN.

Ḑlōir do Dhia aḡ rna hárduib, agur ríodcán air an dtalam deaḡtoil do na dáoirib.

LUKE II. 14.

PUBLISHED MONTHLY, AT 9, UPPER SACKVILLE-STREET, DUBLIN.

Vol. III.—No. 34.

OCTOBER, 1854.

Annual Subscription, 3s. 6d.
Payable in Advance.

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A WISE OLD MAN.

WE have been much struck with the force of the following story, which we find in the leading article of the *Tablet*, of Saturday, October 7:—

"Bacon tells a story of a man who had become famous among his friends for skill in reconciling differences. His son tried his hand at the same difficult task; but having failed on several occasions, he begged his father to tell him the secret of his own great success. The father told him that his secret was a very simple one; he never interfered at the beginning of the dispute; but he waited until the dispute had lasted a long while, until both parties were weary of the controversy; and, though too proud to make advances themselves, were not the less very willing to see an impartial mediator step in and aid them to do, at last, what was the common interest, and the common wish of both disputants."

Nothing is wanting to this story but the name of "the wise old man." Would our readers like to know who he is? No doubt they would. It would make the *Tablet* itself doubly sensible of the old man's wisdom. Now, we happen to know who that old man was; for he is a great acquaintance of ours, and we know him well. The Pope himself calls that "wise old man;" and St. Bernard, "the last of the Fathers," was the foolish son!

Now, listen to this. SEVEN HUNDRED YEARS ago a dispute arose, for the first time, whether the blessed Virgin was conceived immaculate; St. Bernard, like a goose, interfered at the beginning of the dispute; of course, he failed, and all Roman Catholics will shortly be bound to believe that he was little better than a heretic, for he denied the immaculate conception; and his foolish haste to try and preserve the peace and ancient faith of the Church, only resulted in a desperate strife, of some centuries duration, between the Franciscans and Dominicans. Not so, "the wise old man;" he "waited a long while."

At the Council of Trent, after FOUR HUNDRED YEARS of fighting, the Franciscans worked hard to get the Pope and council to settle the question. But the old man was too wise, for the parties were fighting still! The Holy Council, under the old man's direction, expressly said they would not settle it (session v.); and the present Pope, in his letter of February 3, 1849, has said—"This honour has not yet been decreed to the most holy Virgin by the Church, and the APOSTOLIC SEE." So, for THREE HUNDRED YEARS more, the old man has waited still!

But now, when the Dominicans seem to have abandoned the former doctrines and conduct of their order—now, when no Roman Catholic is heard to raise his voice on behalf of St. Bernard—now, when the dispute seems to have worn itself out, and the battle is ended—the wise old man has been for FIVE whole years (since February, 1849) cautiously feeling his way, to step in and settle the question—which he now promises to do on the 8th of December next.

* Our readers may find the history in the 1st and 2nd numbers of the CATHOLIC LAYMAN, JANUARY and FEBRUARY, 1852, vol. I.

Never did a wise old man wait so long, watching till a dispute should be over, that he might then step in and settle it! And that is just the way we know that this is the very old man that is pointed at in the story in the *Tablet*.

No wonder, then, that the *Tablet*, as in duty bound, should admire the wisdom of its "wise old man." But, for us, it savours a little too much of that worldly wisdom, sometimes called cunning, to be suitable to the "Vicar of CHRIST" (who taught the world in another method), or "to the judge of controversies." But "the children of this world are, in their generation, wiser than the children of light."—Luke xvi. 8. And St. Bernard, with many of the errors of his age, was a "child of light" indeed, compared to "the wise old man."

THE INVOCATION OF SAINTS.—No. III.

WE undertook in our first article on this subject to give our readers some account of the manner in which the corrupt practice of saint-worship was gradually introduced into the Church, thinking that no error is fully refuted, until some explanation is given how men ever came to adopt and practice it. And here we shall not indulge in any theory or speculation of our own, but prefer what has been already written by eminent writers; and we consider ourselves fortunate in being able to refer to the writings of a very eminent Roman Catholic author of our own day, M. Beugnot, who has, singularly enough, largely developed the subject in his "*Histoire de la Destruction du Paganisme en Occident*"—a work which is considered one of the masterpieces of modern French literature, and was crowned as such by one of the most learned bodies of Europe, the "Academie des Inscriptions et des Belles Lettres," of Paris. We propose to avail ourselves, in our present article, of the result of his learned labours, merely premising that hero or demon worship was a favourite part of all Pagan systems of religion, and that the invasion of Italy by the Pagan Goths and Vandals appears to have been nearly contemporaneous with the rise and growth of saint-worship in the Church of Rome.

"The fundamental idea of Christianity," says M. Beugnot, "was a new powerful idea, and independent of all those by which it had been preceded. However, the men by whom the Christian system was extended and developed, having been formed in the school of Paganism, could not resist the desire of connecting it with the former systems. It was, indeed, making a large concession to the spirit of ancient times; but they believed that they could correct its inconveniences by maintaining in all its purity the form of Christian worship, and rejecting with disdain the usages and ceremonies of polytheism. When Christianity became the dominant religion, its doctors perceived that they would be compelled to give way equally in respect to the external form of worship, and that they would not be sufficiently strong to constrain the multitude of pagans, who were embracing Christianity with a kind of enthusiasm as unreasoning as it was of little duration, to forget a system of acts, ceremonies, and festivals, which had such an immense power over their ideas and manners. The Church admitted, therefore, into her discipline, many usages evidently pagan. She undoubtedly has endeavoured to purify them, but she never could obliterate the impression of their original stamp."

"This new spirit of Christianity—this eclecticism, which extended even to material things—has, in modern times, given rise to passionate discussions; those borrowings from the old religion were condemned, as having been suggested to the Christians of the fourth and fifth centuries by the remnants of that old love of idolatry which was lurking at the bottom of their hearts. It was easy for the modern reformers to condemn, by an unjust blame, the leaders of the Church; they should, however, have acknowledged, that the principal interest of Christianity was to wrest from error the greatest number of its partisans, and that it was impossible to attain this object without providing for the obstinate adherents of the false gods an easy passage from the temple to the Church. If we consider that, notwithstanding all these concessions, the ruin of paganism was accomplished only by degrees and imperceptibly—that, during more than two centuries, it was necessary to combat, over the whole of Europe, an error which, although continually overthrown, was incessantly rising again—we shall understand that the conciliatory spirit of the leaders of the Church was true wisdom."

"St. John Chrysostom says that the devil having perceived that he could gain nothing with the Christians by pushing them in a direct way into idolatry, adopted for the purpose an indirect one. If the devil—that is to say, the pagan spirit—was changing its plan of attack, the Church was also obliged to modify her system of defence, and not to affect an inflexibility which would have kept from her a great number of people, whose irresolute conscience was fluctuating between falsehood and truth."

"Already, at the beginning of the fifth century, some haughty spirits—Christians who were making a display of the dignity of their virtues, and who were raising an outcry against the profanation of holy things—began to preach a pretended reform; they were recalling the Christians to the apostolic doctrine; they demanded what they were calling a true Christianity. Vigilantius, a Spanish priest, sustained on this subject an animated contest with St. Jerome. He opposed the worship of the saints, and the custom of placing candles on their sepulchres; he condemned, as a source of scandal, the vigils in the basilicas of the martyrs, and many other usages, which were, it is true, derived from the ancient worship. We may judge by the warmth with which St. Jerome refuted the doctrines of this heresiarch, of the importance which he attached to those usages. He foresaw that the mission of the Christian doctrine would be to adapt itself to the manners of all times, and to oppose them only when they would tend towards depravity. Far from desiring to deprive the Romans of certain ceremonial practices which were dear to them, and whose influence had nothing dangerous to the Christian dogmas, he openly took their part, and his conduct was approved by the whole Church."

"If St. Jerome and St. Augustine had shared the opinions of Vigilantius, would they have had the necessary power successfully to oppose the introduction of pagan usages into the ceremonies of the Christian Church? I do not believe they would. After the fall of Rome, whole populations passed under the standards of Christianity, but they did it with their baggage of senseless beliefs and superstitious practices. The Church could not repulse this crowd of self-styled Christians, and still less summon them immediately to abandon all their ancient errors; she, therefore, made concessions which were not entirely voluntary. They may be considered as calculations full of wisdom on the part of the leaders of the Church, as well as the consequence of that kind of irruption which was made at the beginning of the fifth century into the Christian society by populations who, notwithstanding their abjuration, were Pagans in their manners, their tastes, their prejudices, and their ignorance."

"The Romans had derived from their religion an excessive love of public festivals. They were unable to conceive a worship without the pompous apparel of ceremonies. They considered the long processions, the harmonious chants, the splendour of dresses, the light of tapers, the perfume of frankincense, as the essential part of religion. Christianity, far from opposing a disposition which required only to be directed with more wisdom (?), adopted a part of the ceremonial system of the ancient worship. It changed the object of its ceremonies, it cleansed them from their old impurities, but it preserved the days upon which many of them were celebrated; and the multitude found thus in the new religion, as much as in the old one, the means of satisfying its dominant passion."

"The neophytes felt for the pagan temples an involuntary respect. They could not pass at once from veneration to a contempt for the monuments of their ancestors' piety. Christianity understood the power of this feeling; it consented, therefore, to establish the solemnities of its worship in the edifices which it had long disdained. It care not to offend pagan habits was such, that it often respected even the pagan names of those edifices. There are at Rome even now several Churches which had formerly been pagan temples, and thirty-nine of them have been built on the foundation of such temples. Four

* On comparing the Christian calendar with the Pagan one, it is impossible not to be struck by the great concordance between the two. The Saturnalia and several other festivals were celebrated on the calends of January; Christmas was fixed at the same epoch; the Lupercalia—a pretended feast of purification—took place on the calends of February; the Christian purification (Candlemas) was celebrated on the 2nd of February; the festival of Augustus—celebrated on the calends of August—was replaced by that of St. Peter, in vinculis, established on the first of that month.